



Truck 1 Staffing

**A position paper from the
Leesburg Volunteer Fire Company,
Leesburg, Virginia**

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TRUCK 1 STAFFING

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Introduction

Shortly after the “new” Fire and Rescue Commission was formed, Supervisor Jim Burton, then the BOS representative on the Commission, implored system members to provide requests for additional career staffing well in advance to allow time for proper financial planning.

Company 1 followed his directive. On February 27, 2003, Chief Wayne Whetsell sent a formal request for daytime Truck 1 staffing to LCFR Chief Bob Griffin. The request asked for 5x12 coverage to begin on or before January 1, 2005.

The date of the request gave the Loudoun County Department of Fire and Rescue as well as the County Board of Supervisors sufficient time for the financial and staff planning necessary to fulfill the request.

In this paper, we will explore the capabilities of ladder trucks and rescue squads, consider the historical call volume for these vehicles, and look at available alternatives for each. In the end, we believe it will be clear that providing daytime workweek staffing for Truck 1 should be considered a much higher priority than staffing Rescue Squad 13.

Budget Priorities

On October 7th, 2003, the Fire and Rescue Commission was given the first cut of LCFR's staffing priorities list for fiscal year 2005. Staffing for Truck 1 was ninth out of ten on the list of operational unit staffing priorities. 24 x 7 staffing for Rescue Squad 13 was number one. Chief Griffin and County staff provided their view of the staffing requests. High among the justifications for placing Rescue Squad 13 at the top of the list was a perceived need to provide a swift water rescue capability.

At the Fire and Rescue Commission's December 2, 2003 meeting, the commissioners present discussed the list of priorities developed by LCFR and came to the same conclusion we have -- staffing Truck 1 is more important than staffing Rescue Squad 13. As a result, the Commission adopted a recommendation to the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors with Truck 1 as the fourth highest priority and Rescue Squad 13 as the fifth.

Tactical Importance of Ladder Trucks

In deciding the priority of units to staff, the most important consideration must be the preservation of human life. In the fire and rescue business, the first tactical consideration on any operation is rescue. One of the most basic tools needed to effect rescues on emergency calls is a ladder. The ability to quickly reach persons trapped in hazardous situations is paramount to completing an operation with a positive outcome.

Ladder trucks were developed to provide the capability for rescuers to reach trapped victims quickly and safely. As building construction evolves to include a greater number of multi-story dwellings, the tactical importance of a ladder truck grows.

The safety of fire fighters is also highly dependent on the availability of multiple paths of egress from a hazardous atmosphere should something go wrong in an operation. The rapid placement of both ground ladders and an aerial device in effective positions greatly enhances the safety of those risking their lives to save others.

Another unique capability of ladder trucks is their ability to deliver massive quantities of water onto a fire from an elevated position. This capability can be critical to containing large fires and ensuring that exposure building are not affected. Ladder trucks can also provide a means of water supply to the elevated portions of buildings where standpipes do not exist.

Rescue Squad Capabilities

Heavy rescue squads are a more recent development in the history of fire and rescue. They offer additional specialized capabilities, primarily in the area of vehicle rescue using hydraulic cutting and spreading tools. They can also be outfitted to take on additional specialized tasks, including rope rescue, hazardous materials abatement, and collapse rescue. Of late, a big focus of rescue squads has been in the role of RIT (rapid intervention team). With their complement of specialized tools and with highly trained personnel, they can play an important part in the rescue of trapped citizens or fire fighters on a fire scene.

As mentioned previously, the best equipment and personnel will be useless if they cannot reach the person or persons to be rescued. If victims are trapped on the upper floors of a building, it is likely that numerous ladders are going to be needed to mount an effective rescue operation. Without adequate means of ingress and egress, a rescue attempt may fail and may ultimately result in the would-be rescuers becoming victims.

In Loudoun County, rescue squads have historically been owned by companies that specialize in EMS. The primary role of these units has been utilization of their hydraulic tools for vehicle rescue. Personnel that staff these units are not likely to have fire fighter training and as a result, these units are not usually capable of providing the RIT function on a fireground.

Supply and Demand

One of most common tools used for planning staffing needs in the fire service is call volume. Where demand for a unit is high, it is likely there will be periods where that unit

is unavailable and will have to be replaced with a unit that is further away from the emergency scene. In this situation, increasing the supply (i.e., adding an additional unit with like capabilities) of that unit in a geographic area will improve the availability of that type of unit.

In Loudoun County, ladder trucks are in short supply (3 ladder trucks to cover a geographic area of over 500 square miles) and demand is increasing. With the imminent implementation of the NOVA manuals, call volume for Loudoun County's ladder trucks will increase sharply. At this time, we know of no plans by any company in the county to add to the supply of ladder trucks. As a result, it should be anticipated that the availability of ladder trucks in the county will become problematic.

In recognizing the operational capabilities of Loudoun County's rescue squads, a recommendation has been made, and will likely be approved, that the role of a rescue squad in Loudoun County would be more of a support piece, providing air, equipment and lights, but not usually providing the RIT capabilities defined in the NOVA manuals. The RIT role would be taken on by the second ladder truck or an additional engine at the discretion of the incident commander.

Given this situation, how can we not take steps to ensure that our scarcest resources will be available as often as possible?

Call Volume

Historically, the call volume of Loudoun's ladder trucks has been substantially higher than that of the rescue squads. The table below shows the recent numbers for Truck 1 and Rescue Squad 13.

	2003	2004 (thru 2/29/04)
Truck 1	349	60
Rescue Squad 13	84	28*

*Rescue Squad 13's call statistics for 2004 include 18 calls on which the unit responded as an "add on" (i.e., it was not dispatched but responded anyway.)

With the implementation of the NOVA manuals, it is expected that Truck 1's call volume will increase substantially. On fire calls, it seems the direction in Loudoun County is to rely more heavily on ladder trucks than on rescue squads, so it seems prudent to ensure that ladder trucks are available to respond as necessary.

Alternative Apparatus

One of the key abilities of any successful firefighter is her ability to adapt to events and make changes in strategy and tactics as events warrant. These same skills are necessary in the assignment of apparatus to specific calls. When the desired piece of apparatus is not available, quickly find a reasonable substitute. In Loudoun County, there are 5 rescue squads (3, 12, 13, 15, and 17). For vehicle accidents with entrapment, these are the units of choice to dispatch. In the event these units are not

available, there are 3 units that can serve as reasonable replacements – namely, rescue engines. These units are available from Company's 1, 6, and 10. For most simple extrications, these units are able to perform the task quite well.

Ladder trucks, on the other hand, are not nearly as plentiful in the first place. With only 3 trucks to cover over 500 square miles of service area, these resources are quite scarce. So, when one of them is not available, what is the backup? There are only two possibilities at present:

1. Utilize one of the three quints in the county as a ladder truck.
2. Utilize mutual aid agreements to bring these resources into Loudoun County from surrounding jurisdictions.

With a resource pool that is roughly half the size and a call volume that is at least double, the odds are clearly stacked against ladder trucks. Ensuring the prompt and reliable response of all these units should be a very high priority.

Swift Water Rescue

As justification for positioning Rescue Squad 13 high on the list of budgetary priorities, LCFR Chief Bob Griffin explained that he wanted the capability to provide swift water rescue services utilizing the personnel that would be assigned to staff Rescue Squad 13. While providing this capability is a worthy goal, is it truly more important than providing staffing for one of the most critical pieces of apparatus in the fire service?

Are there not more efficient ways to provide this capability? There seems to be no logical reason to attach this function to a heavy rescue squad. First, that type of vehicle is not suited to towing a boat, so another means of transporting watercraft to the scene will have to be found. Wouldn't it make more sense to outfit a utility type vehicle with all the equipment needed for swift water rescue, as well as providing the means of transporting the boat? Such an arrangement would provide a more flexible and efficient platform from which to operate a water rescue team.



Conclusion

While we are not against adding to the capabilities of Loudoun County's fire and rescue system, we feel it is critical that basic needs be covered before moving on to more specialized services. It is our view that ensuring the timely response of Truck 1 is a far more important need than providing staffing for a rescue squad that cannot provide the operational capabilities unique to a ladder truck. With the continued increase in construction of multi-level buildings and a shortage of ladder trucks in the county, it is imperative that Truck 1 be properly staffed and available at all times during the daytime hours of the work week.

Finally, always remember that one of these.....



cannot do this!

